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SUBJECT: ZAPATERO FACES CONTROVERSIAL NUCLEAR POWER PLANT  
DECISION

REF: A. MADRID 469

[1](#)B. 08 MADRID 1362

1.(U) On June 5, the Nuclear Security Council (CSN) recommended that the GOS approve a request to extend the operating license of the Santa Maria de Garona nuclear power plant by 10 years from its scheduled expiration date of July 15. Garona, located in the northern province of Burgos, is the oldest and smallest of Spain's 8 nuclear power plants, in operation since 1971. The recommendation now goes to Minister of Industry, Tourism, and Commerce Miguel Sebastian for a decision by July 5, but the final say doubtless will belong to President Zapatero. If the GOS does not decide to extend the license, the plant would close in 2011.

2.(U) Garona is a relatively small plant, generating only 1.3% of Spain's electricity last year. However, the decision will be a precedent for decisions next year on three larger plants. Zapatero has consistently opposed expanding Spain's use of nuclear power, and the PSOE had promised during the 2008 campaign not to extend licenses beyond plants' useful lives, generally assumed to mean their original 40-year licenses. The GOS has previously closed other plants. However, there are some indications that extension of Garona's license is politically possible. One press report suggested that an agreement for extension had been worked out several weeks ago before falling apart, and Zapatero cautioned last month that the CSN recommendation would play an important role in the government's decision. Nuclear power provides almost 20% of Spain's electricity, and its lack of CO2 emissions contributes to another Zapatero priority, the fight against climate change. Given the expense Spain will incur to buy emission offsets from abroad to compensate for its failure to meet Kyoto CO2 emissions targets, closing this and other nuclear plants would be costly. Advocates of extension argue that the facility in Garona is almost identical to a plant of the same age in Minnesota that has a state license to operate until 2031. The opposition PP and labor groups support maintaining current plants open as long as they are viable and building new plants. However, a 2008 poll found that 48 percent of Spaniards opposed expanding nuclear power and 40 percent favored it.

3.(U) Comment: Zapatero's statements have been ambiguous enough that proponents of extending the plant's license hope he will decide to extend the license. Political factors certainly will play an important role in the decision. One press report indicated that the PSOE-appointed members of the CSN had agreed to recommend approval only if the recommendation, which was due June 5, would not be made public until June 8, after Spaniards voted in the European Parliament elections.  
CHACON